

The Hidden Consequences of College Drinking

Fall Semester Is a Critical Time for Parents to Discuss the Risks with First-year Students

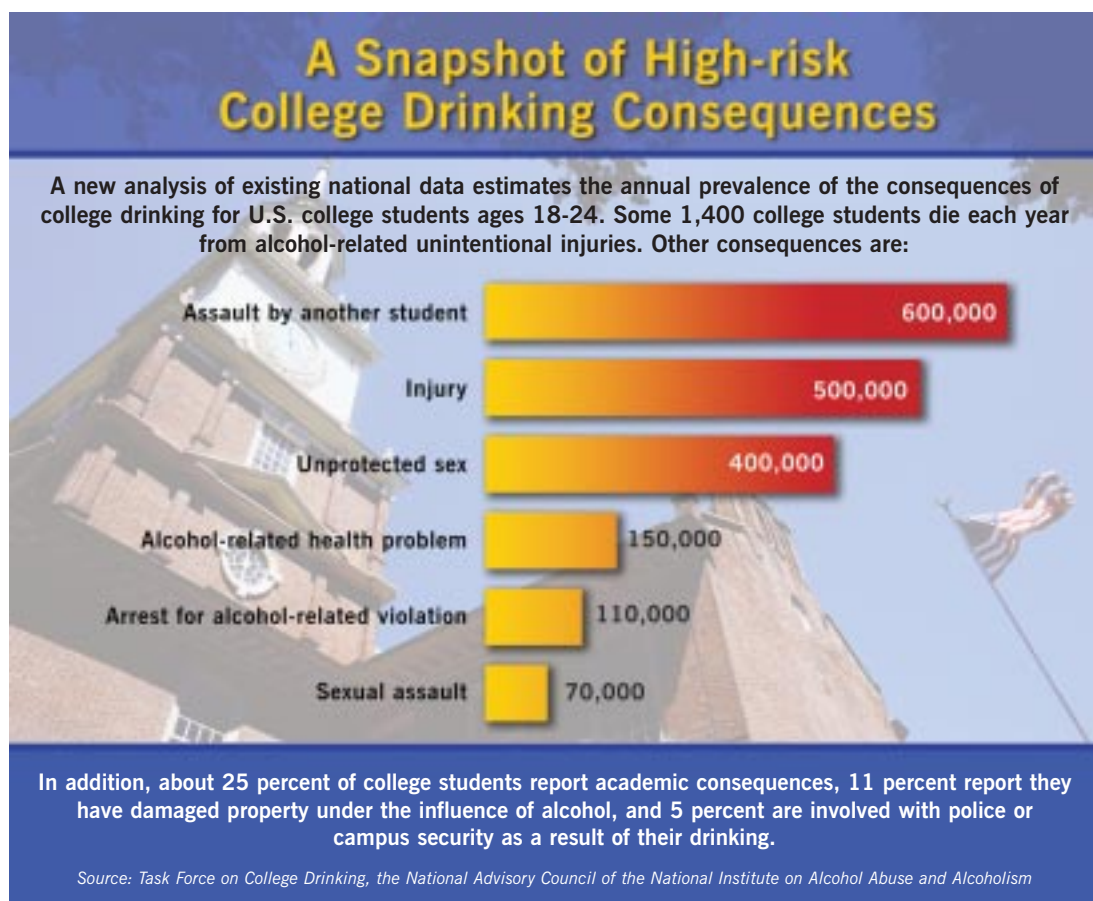
As college students arrive on campus this fall, it's a time of new experiences, new friendships, and making memories that will last a lifetime. Unfortunately for many, it is also a time of excessive drinking and dealing with its aftermath—vandalism, violence, sexual aggression, and even death.

According to research summarized in a recent Task Force report to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism (NIAAA) at the National Institutes of Health, part of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, the consequences of excessive drinking by college students are more significant, more destructive, and more costly than many parents recognize. And they affect all students, whether or not they drink.

The report notes that drinking by college students aged 18 to 24 contributes to an estimated 1,400 student deaths, 500,000 injuries, and 70,000 cases of sexual assault or date rape each year. The chart summarizes other significant consequences identified in the report.

Early Weeks Are Critical

As the fall semester begins, parents can use this important time to help prepare their college-age sons and daughters by alerting them to the consequences of excessive drinking.



According to the NIAAA Task Force report, some first-year students who live on campus may be at particular risk for alcohol misuse. During their high school years, those who go on to college tend to drink *less* than their non-college-bound classmates. However, during subsequent years, the heavy drinking rates of college students *surpass* those of their non-college peers.

This rapid increase in heavy drinking over a relatively short period of time can contribute to serious difficulties with the transition to college.

Meanwhile, anecdotal evidence suggests that the first 6 weeks of the first semester are critical to a first-year student's academic success. Because many students initiate heavy drinking during these early days of college, the potential exists for excessive alcohol consumption to interfere with successful adaptation to campus life. The transition to college is often so difficult to negotiate that about one third of first-year students fail to enroll for their second year.

Parents Can Help

During these crucial early weeks, parents can do a variety of things to stay involved. They can inquire about campus alcohol policies, call their sons and daughters frequently, and ask about roommates and living arrangements.

They should also discuss the penalties for underage drinking as well as how alcohol use can lead to date rape, violence, and academic failure.

Resources Are Available

For parents who want to talk to their college-age sons and daughters about the consequences of college drinking, a variety of helpful resources are available from NIAAA.

The final report of the Task Force on College Drinking is available, along with a special guide for parents that offers current, research-based information plus helpful advice on choosing the right college, staying involved during freshman year, and getting assistance if faced with an alcohol-related crisis.

The Task Force's award-winning website, www.collegedrinkingprevention.gov, features links to alcohol policies at colleges across the country, an interactive graphic of a human body and how alcohol affects it, an interactive alcohol cost calculator, and the full text of all Task Force materials.

Copies of all Task Force materials may be ordered from this website or by contacting the NIAAA Publications Distribution Center, P.O. Box 10686, Rockville, MD 20849-0686.

